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Uplifting work



Shenzhou XIV mission commander Chen Dong exits the Tiangong space station lab module on Thursday, the China Manned Space Agency said in a statement. Chen and crew member Cai Xuzhe worked together on several tasks outside the craft, including the installation of equipment to link modules, the agency said.

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Shenzhou XIV crew completes 3rd spacewalk

Connection devices installed for easier astronaut movement outside station

By ZHAO LEI

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The Shenzhou XIV mission crew on board the Tiangong space station completed its third spacewalk on Thursday afternoon, according to the China Manned Space Agency.

The agency said in a news release that mission commander Chen Dong and crew member Cai Xuzhe opened a hatch at 11:16 am and floated out of the Tiangong station. Another crew member, Liu Yang, stayed inside the station to provide technical support, it added.

During the spacewalk that ended at 4:50 pm, Chen and Cai mounted inter-module connection devices between the Tianhe core module and the two lab modules, and then Cai used the connection devices to move among the modules.

Li Xuedong, a structural designer of the space station at the China Academy of Space Technology in Beijing, said that it is quite difficult for astronauts to move between station modules on a spacewalk so the inter-module connection devices will act like bridges that give a lot of convenience to the crew.

The pair also adjusted the Wentian lab module's external panoramic camera and installed a handle on the station's minor robotic arm, according to the release.

This was the first spacewalk by Chinese astronauts since the Tiangong's

in-orbit assembly was recently completed. The operation verified the combined robotic arm's capability to support astronauts and the Wentian lab module's performance during the spacewalk, said the agency.

Chen and Liu conducted the Shenzhou XIV mission's first spacewalk on Sept 1, working six hours outside the Tiangong station. Chen and Cai carried out the second spacewalk on Sept 17 and stayed more than four hours in space.

The crew arrived at Tiangong on the evening of June 5, several hours after their spacecraft was launched from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in the northwestern Gobi Desert. They are scheduled to continue orbiting with the station until early December, when the Shenzhou XV crew will take over.

Currently, the Tiangong station consists of the Tianhe core module, the Wentian and Mengtian lab modules, the Shenzhou XIV spacecraft used to transport the astronauts as well as the newly arrived Tianzhou 5 cargo ship.

With an overall weight of nearly 70 metric tons, Tiangong is one of the largest space-based infrastructures mankind has built and deployed in outer space. It is expected to operate in a low-Earth orbit about 400 kilometers above the ground for about 10 years and will be open to astronauts from other countries in the near future, space officials have said.